ADVERTISING WITH LIGHT COMMERCE AND THE MAGIC LANTERN

Daniela Müller-Kob

Although some published works mention uses of the magic lantern for advertising purposes, this history has not been adequately explored by advertising historians. Considering the wide range of available literature that discusses the complex interdisciplinarity of themes of advertising, this seems a curious omission. It creates the impression that the history of advertising is straightforward: it begins with different print products such as flyers, announcements and posters and shifts directly into early cinema. On the question of whether there was anything else in between, no answer can be found – unless you happen to know about the role of the magic lantern. Even in specialist literature this usage is only mentioned marginally. Any further analysis of the pictorial material, methods of performance, questions about production and distribution, or of local differences, has been very superficial. As the media historian Erkki Huhtamo observed in 2009 there is still a research gap. ‘Commercial outdoor projections became a well-established tradition, although their full extent is not yet known.’

Advertisers have always tried to use the available media environment to spread their sales message as widely as possible. At the same time, they have tried to separate themselves from the messages of their rivals through novel and inventive means, to get the attention of the particular circle of people in which they are interested. The many specific models of advertising found in the late nineteenth century show that advertisers know that the emotional response of the recipient would lead to a better acceptance of their sales message. This was recognised even before the establishment of market research in the early twentieth century.

Psychologists have shown that pictures and transferred emotions have a positive effect on recall, recognition and approval, which results in an unconscious positive assessment by the consumer. However, recipients soon develop defence mechanisms through daily exposure to different kinds of media, and become less receptive to these kinds of messages. These might seem to be modern theories, but articles in the German journal Die Reklame make clear that advertisers were already recognising this effect, long before it was scientifically proven. Constant innovation

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Daniela Muller-Kalb

Although some published works mention uses of the magic lantern for advertising purposes, this history has not been adequately explored by advertising historians.1 Considering the wide range of available literature that discusses the complex interdisciplinary themes of advertising, this seems a curious omission.2 It creates the impression that the history of advertising is straightforward: it begins with different print products such as flyers, announcements and posters and shifts directly into early cinema. On the question of whether there was anything else in between, no answer can be found — unless you happen to know about the role of the magic lantern. Even in specialists' literature this usage is only mentioned marginally. Any further analysis of the pictorial material, methods of performance, questions about production and distribution, or of local differences, has been very superficial. As the media historian Erkki Huhtamo observed in 2009 there is still a research gap.3

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Psychologists have shown that pictures and transferred emotions have a positive effect on recall, recognition and approval, which results in an unconscious positive assessment by the consumer.6 However, recipients soon develop defence mechanisms through daily exposure to different kinds of media, and become less receptive to these kinds of messages. These might seem to be modern theories, but articles in the German journal Die Reklame make clear that advertisers were already recognizing this effect, long before it was scientifically proven.7 Constant innovation

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6. A journal published 1885-1903 by Robert Esers.


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b) Moderate-level involvement: a separate commercial break before, after or during a performance, which can be recognized as such by the viewer, who sees this as an acceptable intrusio for which he will be rewarded with the promise of further entertainment. Advertisement and entertainment are here equal. Examples of use: advertising which interrupts a performance, but also street advertisements that present entertaining aspects.

c) High-level involvement: slides casually embedded in an information or entertainment programme. The audience focuses on the entertainment, not on the advertisement.

LOW-LEVEL INVOLVEMENT

The first known use of a magic lantern in the streets for advertising purposes was in 1870 in a shop window in Paris. In the following years, this innovation spread first to America, then to Great Britain and lastly to Germany. Curtains in shop windows, walls, pavements and even screens stretched across high rooftops were, all used for projection; with single slides or engravings of several slides shown in the evenings without commentary. The only requirement for the operator was to change the pictures at regular intervals, until, in 1888, even this work was superseded by clockwork-based mechanisms.8 To illuminate the walls, or the screens hanging on them, it was common practice to place the operator in a window on the opposite side of the street, hidden from passersby. Where this was impossible a small, unheated shack on the roof was sometimes the only shelter for both the operator and his projection device.9

After examining different sources, it appears that this kind of advertisement programme was projected after dark for up to three hours each day.10 Depending on the season, these presentations finished by 11 p.m. or the latest. Every slide was shown on the screen for 10 to 60 seconds, before being exchanged for the following ones.11 The repertoire of slides was shown several times during these three hours, a fact which was particularly mentioned to prospective advertisers and agencies.12 Probably for finacial reasons, this form of nocturnal advertising was only given in exclusive shopping districts.
in large cities of America, Great Britain and Germany. These kinds of announcements were mentioned for the last time in around 1903, when they were supplanted by new, cheaper forms of advertising using electrical lighting.

MODERATE AND HIGH LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Advertisements introduced into magic lantern performances, where people attended freely and where darkness made it difficult for them to look away from the screen, were naturally of great interest to the advertisers. Whether or not it was possible to identify a separate commercial break during a running magic lantern performance was determined by the artistic judgment of the operator, and in practice, there was considerable overlap between 'high' and 'moderate' levels of involvement. Through his skill and imagination, the showman could introduce slides seamlessly without the commercial background being immediately recognised by the audience. But even when this was made more overt, the audience could still be entertained by what they saw if the slides were sufficiently appealing. The only problem might be if the advertising agency or the slide producers gave instructions that a picture had to be shown at a particular moment or specified the text the operator was to deliver. The only reason for the showman to commit to such restrictions, if he was not an employee of the enterprise, was the opportunity to improve his programme with attractive slides provided for free.14

Given the heterogeneous nature of magic lantern entertainments (Ludwig Vogl-Bienek describes them as 'Beschlusungssteuerung von Aufnahmegeräten'15), it is not surprising that advertisers offered a wide range of different material. After all, it was essential not to imitate the intrusive methods of market traders, but instead to ensure that the performers retained their usual style and allowed advertisements to be absorbed as part of their shows. Companies developed a variety of material suitable for every kind of situation. They offered motto slides for opening and closing the show, complete narrative series, and even chronograms in which the centre was left open for lettering or trademarks.16 Sometimes, whole events were devised for commercial purposes, as the soap manufacturer Maggi did at the beginning of the twentieth century. The audience was invited to visit a free event, where delicious saus was served and an entertainment promoting the company's work and manufacturing methods provided.17 The problem for the audience in such cases was the fine distinction between 'advertising' and 'entertainment', which came to form an almost inseparable and symbiotic relationship. It was sometimes impossible to say where information ended and advertising began.

Though this is still a short review of the possibilities for making the magic lantern part of the economic supply chain, it is clear that companies exploited this medium in many different ways. Slides continued to be used for announcements in the cinema until the late twentieth century, but by then most of the other advertising methods used in projection had long since disappeared from everyday life. It is only through careful analysis of surviving catalogues, slides and other records that we can hope to build a clearer picture of this little-known aspect of magic lantern history.

Daniela MÖLLER-KÖLB is studying for a PhD in media sciences at the University of Tübingen. She is analysing slide catalogues as part of self-marketing strategies and would love to hear your opinions about advertising with early projection devices. muse2001@uni-tuebingen.de


THE SLIPPING SLIDES OF ARCHER & SONS

Lester Smith

I have always been fond of the animated sliding slides of Archer & Sons. The company was established in Liverpool in 1848 by William Frederick Archer, an optician who also specialised in musical instruments. His eldest son Walter took over the business around 1875. Soon after William died, Walter's two younger brothers, Frederick and Foster Archer, joined the company, and in 1881 added several more shops. It appears that they stopped trading soon after the end of the First World War. The last advertisement I have found for them was in May 1937 when they were offering a new biunial, two models of single lantern and a quick-action slide changer.

The slipping slides of Archer were easily recognised on two counts. Firstly, the wooden frames are the standard 7 inches x 4 inches, except that the upper and lower wooden frame is only ⅛ inch wide instead of the usual ⅛ inch. This would explain the glass being ¼ inch wider. Secondly, the paintings fill the whole area of picture shown on the screen, not only on the static view but also on the slipping slide that replaces it when it is 'pulled'. Most are very beautifully painted. A description is written along the top outside edge in black ink with descriptive titles such as 'The Artist Who Will Make A Noise In The World' or 'Professor Ketcham In Search of Science', or simply 'Boy Sprinting Water'.

Another distinctive feature is the subject matter. They almost always seem to be of the 'calamity' variety: an accident is about to happen... and does. There are very few of the more general type of slipping slide such as flowers opening, animals drinking, eyes looking left and right, eating or drinking and so on which make up a considerable amount of other makers' stocks. With over fifty Archer slides I have examined, almost every one is a 'calamity'.

There are exceptions of course, and in my collection there is a series of slides which go together to tell a story. The longest sequence comprises three slip slides, hence six different images. It tells the story of a canary that escapes from its cage and flies back to the shopkeeper who sold it, while desperately being followed by its master (Fig. 1). The second story of two slides, using these pictures, is about a sum of money being pulled to a dog for as long as it lives (Fig. 2). Unfortunately it dies, so the owner gets it stuffed.

On a predetermined day, she presents it to the solicitor unmars her arm whilst a small boy, hidden from sight, wags the dog's tail. The picture 5 depicts this type of company. Archer & Sons concentrated on new ideas to improve their lanterns and did not produce a great many slides. They regularly ran advertisements in the Optical Magic Lantern Journal for their lanterns and very occasionally a new set of slides was mentioned. 'Slum Life in the Great Cities', one of their most famous productions, appeared in October 1882. In 1891 they boasted 'Effect slides painted for the wholesale London Houses', so maybe they mostly supplied the wholesale business. I have never found a catalogue or seen any lists for their slipping slides, which I would dearly love to find. Of my own Archer slides, about 10 per cent have the name impressed into the wood, along the top or edge along the bottom. This is usually of F.W. & H.H. Archer, 43 Lord St & 60 South Castle St, and therefore after 1881 when they expanded their base of operations. This may also suggest my other slip slides are earlier than this.

Comments on this subject are always welcome please.

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2. Entry 'Archers' in Lucema database www.slides.uni-tuebingen.de.

Professor Ketcham In Search of Science

1. Old Men Pulling Boat On
2. Old Men Pulling Boat On
3. Old Men Pulling Boat On